

Stonewall Scotland
Mansfield Traquair Centre
15 Mansfield Place
Edinburgh
EH3 6BB

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1573 (Statutory teaching of LGBTI+ issues)

Dear Convenor,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to the above petition on statutory teaching of LGBTI issues in schools.

Whilst much has changed in recent years, bullying is still a daily occurrence for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people. Too many teachers lack the confidence and training to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying or to address LGBT issues, meaning that discriminatory language goes unchallenged and LGBT people are often excluded from the curriculum. We feel that there is a need for strong leadership from the government on this issue, and that consistent training for teachers on LGBT issues is imperative.

IMPACT OF HOMOPHOBIC, BIPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING

[More than half of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people experience homophobic bullying](#), with more than 99 per cent hearing homophobic language at school. We know that these behaviours can have a serious impact on the attainment and wellbeing of LGBT young people. The [School Report Scotland](#) found that seven in ten young lesbian, gay or bisexual people in Scotland skip school at some point. [Three in five young LGB people in the UK](#) who experience homophobic bullying say that it's impacted on their school work, while one in three that they change their future educational plans because of it. Critically, we also know that bullying has a devastating effect on the mental health of LGBT young people, with more than half of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people in Scotland self-harming, and one in four attempting to take their own life at some point. Yet [the Teachers Report](#) revealed that only 16 per cent of teachers have received any training on how to tackle HBT bullying.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The extent to which different local authorities view tackling HBT bullying as a priority varies significantly, with some local authorities emerging as examples of good practice. For example, Highland Council have now developed an authority wide policy on supporting trans and gender variant pupils. West Lothian Council have been sharing the best practice on LGBT issues in their schools so that teachers can learn from each other. West Lothian Council, South Ayrshire Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Fife Council, Perth and Kinross Council, Moray Council, and Aberdeenshire Council have also joined our Education Champions Programme, committing to work with us to tackle HBT bullying and to support LGBT young people within their schools. Other local authorities, such as East Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh City Council have engaged with us in the past. However, from the majority of local authorities, we have seen little or no meaningful attempts to work with us on this issue.

When we released the Teachers Report 2014, copies of this report were provided to the directors of Education (or equivalent position) of every local authority in Scotland, as copies of The School Report were on its release in 2012. This report confirmed previous findings that homophobic language and bullying continues to be a problem in our schools, as well as revealing that only 16 per cent of teachers were trained to tackle it. We received a response from a small number of local authorities, some of whom joined the Education Champions programme as a result. However, the majority have not responded, or approached us to what steps they can take to support LGBT young people.

‘DEALING WITH HOMOPHOBIA’ TOOLKIT

In 2009, the government and LGBT Youth Scotland published a toolkit aiming to support teachers to tackle homophobic bullying. Whilst this was a valuable resource at the time of publication, it predates both the Equality Act and equal marriage legislation and now requires substantial updating. We would be excited to be part of that process, and happy to contribute our knowledge and existing resources in this area. We also believe that such guidance would be much more effective if accompanied by widespread training.

STONEWALL’S TRAIN THE TRAINER PROGRAMME

Since June 2014, Stonewall Scotland have delivered a Train the Trainer programme to teachers and other staff working with children and young people. Different sessions are run for primary and secondary lessons, each tailored to the needs of the sector. The training normally costs £150 per person (currently subsidised to £100).

Over the day long programme, attendees learn about HBT bullying and the barriers faced by LGBT students, as well as looking in depth at trans issues. Attendees spend time considering how LGBT issues can be included in the classroom and curriculum, how they can support LGBT pupils and tackle and prevent HBT bullying. They also learn training techniques that they can use to train their colleagues when

they return to the school. At the end of the day, they create an action plan to plan how they can put what they've learnt into action when they return to school, including training colleagues. All attendees are also provided with a pack of resources and a year of support from Stonewall Scotland to assist them in this.

We have no doubt that Train the Trainer is a very powerful programme. It has proved highly effective at raising teacher confidence in tackling HBT bullying and empowering teachers to address LGBT issues in their schools. 99 per cent of attendees say they feel more confident in tackling HBT bullying as a result of attending the course. It equips teachers to train their colleagues, sharing their knowledge and confidence with others. Initial follow ups suggest that within the first six months, 50 per cent of attendees had already gone on to train colleagues whilst a further 33 per cent have training planned for the future.

Whilst we have been pleased with the feedback from this programme, many teachers have told us that practical barriers stop them from accessing the training. Many teachers simply cannot get the cover to allow them to leave school, whilst others cannot afford it. In some areas, particularly where we work with the local authority through the Education Champions Programme, uptake is much higher than other parts of the country. To try and overcome these barriers, we hope to run these sessions in collaboration with local authorities, making it easier for teachers to access the programme. We will be running our first pilot session in collaboration with Aberdeen City Council in the spring. The cost of this in house programme is £1500+VAT, and we hope will reach up to 36 staff. If each attendee is able to cascade this to teachers in 20 teachers in their school, this gives the programme a potential reach of over 720 other staff. We will continue to support the local authority, and we hope that they will take on a strong leadership role in this, supporting schools locally. This will allow schools to receive clear support on this issue, and make our support for local authorities more sustainable. However, inconsistent uptake across the country remains problematic.

Stonewall Scotland's model is designed with the aim of creating a self-improving and sustainable school led system. It has peer to peer support and professional development at its heart. We want to utilise the experience schools can offer each other and ensure long term sustainability by supporting inter-school links and networks.

CONCLUSION

We would agree with the TIE campaign that there is significant inconsistency in the approach schools and local authorities take to addressing LGBT issues. Whilst we are delighted to see more schools addressing LGBT issues in a proactive way, they must be the rule and not the exception. We would welcome a clear strategy from the Scottish Government as to how they will systematically address the bullying and lack of support and experienced by LGBT young people in Scotland. Scottish Government should show leadership on this issue by issuing clear guidance to local authorities on how LGBT issues can be included as part of Curriculum for Excellence.

The committee may wish to note that the UK Government awarded two million pounds in funding to organisations tackling HBT bullying in schools in England. In 2014, they also commissioned NatCen Social Research to review best practice in tackling and preventing HBT bullying. The UK Government

Secretary of State for Education has also made several public statements on the need for schools to tackle HBT bullying. We believe that creating a new wave of highly skilled teachers who can support others to tackle bullying will have immense benefits across the education system and remove one of the most significant barriers to pupil attainment.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Colin Macfarlane

Director,
Stonewall Scotland